NCA
VOA FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5583 MARCH 7, 1978
DAVID LENT/ROME

TERRORISTS CHALLENGE ITALY

ANNCR:

THE COUNTDOWN IS UNDERWAY IN A CHALLENGE BY ITALY'S LEFTIST URBAN GUERRILLAS AGAINST THE VERY LEGAL SYSTEM OF THE STATE. FROM ROME, VOA'S DAVID LENT SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

ITALY'S MAIN TERRORIST GROUP -- THE RED BRIGADES -- HAS THREATENED ALL THOSE CONNECTED WITH A TRIAL OF FORTY-NINE URBAN GUERRILLAS SCHEDULED TO START IN TURIN ON THURSDAY. THE THREAT IS NOT EMPTY.

TWICE THE URBAN GUERRILLAS HAVE FORCED POSTPONEMENT OF THE TRIAL. AND OVER THE WEEKEND, THEY TRIED AGAIN -- BOMBING THE HOUSE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE TURIN LAWYERS' SOCIETY. HIS PREDECESSOR WAS ASSASSINATED LAST YEAR IN A HAIL OF MACHINE GUN BULLETS. THAT ASSASSINATION CAUSED THE SECOND POSTPONEMENT OF THE TRIAL. FOUR OF EIGHT MAGISTRATES ASSIGNED TO TRY THE TERRORISTS REPORTED SICK.

THE FIRST POSTPONEMENT CAME IN JUNE OF 1976 AFTER THE DEFENDANTS REJECTED DEFENSE LAWYERS ASSIGNED THEM -- AND THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL WAS SHOT IN GENOA WITH TWO OF HIS BODYGUARDS.

THE RED BRIGADES HAVE LEFT NO DOUBT ABOUT THEIR DETERMINATION TO PREVENT THE TRIAL FROM EVER TAKING PLACE. LAST MONTH THEY SHOT THE ROME MAGISTRATE RESPONSIBLE FOR PRISON CONSTRUCTION. HE HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN PREPARING A FORMER MILITARY BARRACKS IN TURIN WHERE THE TRIAL IS TO TAKE PLACE.

IN A STATEMENT FOLLOWING THE ASSASSINATION, THE RED BRIGADES DECLARED THAT "JUDGES, JURORS, LAWYERS AND THEIR FAMILIES SHOULD THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT THIS. THE TRIAL OF THE RED BRIGADES," THE STATEMENT SAID, "WILL NOT TAKE PLACE -- NOT NOW AND NEVER."

THIS ATMOSPHERE OF INTIMIDATION HAS MADE THE ASSEMBLY OF A JURY EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. SIX MAIN JURORS HAVE AGREED TO SERVE -- AFTER MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED CANDIDATES PLEADED ILLNESS OR PAID SMALL FINES FOR REJECTING JURY DUTY.

A LEADING WOMAN POLITICIAN AGREED OVER THE WEEKEND TO SERVE. THE THIRTY-SEVEN YEAR OLD SECRETARY OF ITALY'S RADICAL PARTY, MARIA ADELAIDE AGLIETTA, SAID SHE HAD AGREED TO SERVE BECAUSE SHE CONSIDERS IT HER CONSTITUTIONAL DUTY.

THE NEED TO SERVE IS CLEAR: INTERIOR MINISTRY STATISTICS SHOW THAT TERRORIST CRIME INCREASED BY SEVENTY SEVEN PERCENT IN ITALY LAST YEAR. DURING THE SAME PERIOD, FEWER PERSONS WERE APPREHENDED.

NOBODY HERE THINKS THAT THE LAST WORD HAS BEEN HEARD FROM THE RED BRIGADES -- AS THE COUNTDOWN TO THE OPENING OF THE TURIN TRIAL ON THURSDAY CONTINUES. PRECAUTIONS HAVE BEEN TAKEN. MORE THAN ONE THOUSAND POLICE ARE INVOLVED IN GUARDING THE BARRACKS WHERE THE TRIAL IS TO TAKE PLACE, AND THE PARTICIPANTS, ESPECIALLY THE JURORS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

THUS, THE GUERRILLAS ARE CHALLENGING THE VERY LEGAL SYSTEM OF THE STATE. IT IS FELT HERE THAT SURVIVAL OF A STATE BASED ON LAW DEPENDS UPON MEETING THE CHALLENGE IN A COURTROOM IN TURIN ON THURSDAY.

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WJL/RTD